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ABSTRACT

Both mother and teacher are social agents in the child's environment and provide the foci for the two separate, but related, ongoing studies on reinforcement patterns described in this paper. The specimen record is the primary method used to obtain data. For the study of children at home, the sample includes 24 3-year-old children from lower income urban, middle income urban, and lower income rural families. Eight half-hour observations are planned for each child. Mealtime was chosen as the situational setting, but sampling has been difficult since some lower income families do not have organized meals. This general lack of scheduling or temporal patterning is one of the environmental factors affecting children's development; a second one is the behavioral inconsistency of the adults around children. The qualitative aspects of mothers' behavior and the frequency of unpredictable behavior towards the child are to be examined in this study. The pilot study of five teachers of culturally deprived 5-year-olds, involves gathering half-hour specimen records of teacher behavior in two classroom settings. Teacher behavior will then be divided into episodes (identifiable goal-directed actions). The long range study goal is to find clues on how to select teachers and help them act as constructive agents in the child's environment. (NH)

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Research, Change, and Social Responsibility: Studies of the Imprint of the Low-Income Home on Young Children

Maxine Schoggen

The original Early Training Project (Gray and Klaus, 1965) raised a number of questions about reinforcement patterns in the home, such as : Do children in low income homes receive a smaller total amount of positive reinforcement than children from middle income homes? Do these same mothers reinforce for inhibitory behavior more often than do mothers in middle income homes ? We were intrigued by such questions; they have led us to look more carefully at what actually does happen to children at home. At about the same time, after watching teachers in action in the DARCEE pre-school, we became interested in trying to capture in concerte, descriptive terms, the ordinary behavior of teachers, day-to-day, in their own classrooms. From there two interests, two separate but related pieces of research are in progress in which the specimen record is the main method of gathering data. A specimen record is (Barker and Wright, 1954) a rich, detailed, sequential description of a child's behavior and environment during an observational period. Notes are taken by a skilled observer in the field using a portable tape recorder and a shielded microphone.

One of our major objectives from the beginning was that these records could form a stockpile of raw material which would have both immediate and long range usefullness, to ourselves and to others.

For the study of children at home, our sample includes 24 three-year-old children, eight from lower income urban, eight from middle income urban, and eight from lower income rural families. Some of these children have siblings in one of our demonstration or research preschools. With eight approximately 30-minute observations planned for each child, we shall have about four hours (350-400 pp) of descriptions of behavior for each of the 24 children.

Situation sampling is one of our thorniest problems. A number of recent reports suggest that the particular setting or the immediate context of behavior does much to determine the nature of the behavior. In contrast to taking a single sample of behavior from each of a large number of subjects, our approach is to sample repeatedly the behavior of a few subjects within comparable settings. We looked for settings which would be comparable across socio-economic groups. We reasoned that all families have to make provision for eating and that meals provide a high potential for social interaction. We, therefore, attempted to center our observations around eating situations, preferably an organized meal, when and if it occurs. As you might imagine all did not go smoothly. In one rural family we observed around noontime, the mother was busy folding clothes and making the bed. She turned to her three-year-old suddenly to ask, "'s at yours?" referring to a sandwich lying on a nearby table. The child responded by wordlessly picking it up and taking it outside. The mother no longer even

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noticed the child. The three-year-old walked purposefully a few feet from the house and vigorously threw the sandwich into the bushes. He then brushed his hands together with a look of satisfaction as if "mission accomplished." This is as close to mealtime as we have observed in our nine visits to this family to date. An observer has been present when the father returned from work and noted no activity indicating that a planned meal was forthcoming. Other research has suggested that lower income families organize fewer family activities than do middle income families. Indeed we see evidence that there is a clear lack of temporal organization in some of the homes we are studying. A more systematic method of getting information on the extent and kind of scheduling that goes on in all homes is planned to provide basic data on the amount of such scheduling and to provide information to guide our sampling procedure.

Using the specimen records of children at home, we are looking at ways in which the natural environment impringes upon the child through actions of social agents, particularly mothers, siblings, fathers and peers. To do this, we are analyzing the records in terms of Environmental Force Units. An Environmental Force Unit is defined (Schoggen,1963) as any action on the part of an agent in the child's immediate environment which is directed to the child and which is recognized as such by the child. These units are identifiable in a reliable way and we maintain a continuous check on our level of reliability.

Once these units are identified they may be described in a variety of ways. One way in which we are especially interested is to ask, "What kinds of goals do agents have with respect to the child?" For example, in an earlier study (Schoggen, 1963) on children in upper-lower and middle income families, it was found that the single most frequent kind of goal which all agents had for the children was for the child to cease his demands upon the agent, for example, "Not now, I'm busy!" The question we raised at the outset of this study about more frequent occurrence of reinforcement for inhibitory behavior by lower income mothers would now appear to be more complex than it seemed at first. It may not by that agents in lower income homes tell children to "Go 'way and leave me alone" more often than do agents in middle income homes. It may be that the differences lie in what else there is to "go away" to and against what other pressures from the environment these "go away" injunctions occur. It is to these kinds of questions that we plan to address ourselves in the immediate future.

We can look at some qualitative aspects of the behavior of mothers to their children. When, for example, in the excerpt in your handout (page 7), Owen whines at his mother for 50 seconds, she ignores him at first; after several seconds, she smiles at him; after several seconds more, she slaps him. Surely to grow up on an environment where behavior is as unpredictable as this must have some effect upon the cognitive development of the child. Our present analysis will measure the frequency of such environmental capriciousness.

Another area of unpredictability for some of these children is that same lack of temporal-spatial organization within the family which gives us sampling problems. We find children eating only when they are insistent enough to demand food or to scrounge for themselves. We see children falling asleep in front of the ubiquitous TV. No seuqence or patterning of activity is visible to us and we wonder if it is to the children. It is perhaps at this point that we might return to the circle with some hunches about ways of helping mothers to implement the temporal-spatial organization of home activities.

On quite another dimension, a somewhat peripheral one, but one which was an unexpected bonus, we find that in our specimen records we have a sample of the child's functional vocabulary which although it is not complete appears to be representative. This information can readily be incorporated into curriculum plans for our new training center in the rural area.

When the child starts to school, the teacher replaces the mother as a primary social agent for a large part of the day. We are, therefore, interested in viewing the teacher as a constructive social agent in the child's environment. However, we also became interested in teachers via another, more practical path. Faced with selecting and training groups of teachers, we became curious as to what kinds of information we were using when we decided that Person A would be a suitable teacher and Person B would not. After watching the progress of these teachers in the classrooms of DARCEE, it seemed to us that we could see differences in the minute-to-minute behavior of different teachers which appeared to be related to their varying skills.

We began a pilot study with five teachers, each in a different classroom of culturally deprived five-year-olds. Samples of teacher behavior were gathered, again using specimen records, in two different settings, "greeting children" or similar setting and large group activity involving teaching or demonstration. Each sample is approximately 30 minutes long. These descriptions, too, are seen as documents of teacher behavior to be made available for analysis by us and others. They can serve as "case study" type material for teacher training purposes.

We have begun our current analysis of these records by dividing the teacher's behavior into "episodes." An episode is defined (Wright, 1967) as a goal directed action which proceeds in a single psychological direction and which has an identifiable beginning and end. These units too can be reliably identified and again, we can subject them to a variety of analyses.

Preliminary analysis has shown, for example, marked differences between teachers just in number of episodes per unit of time in comparable settings. The behavior of some teachers appears to move continuously toward a goal for long periods of time, (long, uninterrupted episodes) while the behavior of other teachers appears to move choppily first in one direction then another (numerous episodes of short duration).

When we ask who starts and stops the teacher's behavior episodes, we find that the teacher with long, continuous episodes is also the teacher who begins and ends more of her own behavior units. The teacher with

numerous short episodes does not as often start and stop her own behavior, someone or something else does. In your handout (page 10) are excerpts from the actual specimen records of two different teachers during the first minute of the day. They represent the two extremes described here. The teacher with numerous short episodes also appears to us to follow no planned schedule as was indicated by events in the records. An example of this can be found in the full record of Mr. Brown. At 3'00" into the day Mr. Brown says to the aide, somewhat anxiously, "Do you want to sing a couple of songs before we start this morning? Or maybe play some games?" Hesitating, the aide replies, "What do you want to play, Bingo?" Hurriedly, in a relieved tone Mr. Brown says, "Yes, Bingo." Here Mr. Brown clearly shows that he is not following a carefully thought-out plan of activities toward specific goals for the children. His behavior at school is much like that of Owen's mother at home, coping with emergencies which arise rather than carrying out plans toward specific goals.

Early in our analytical stage we received "feed in" from the Demonstration section about factors to build into our analytical system. One of these was the suggestion that we look at whether the teacher's behavior is at all times relevant to the activity which she is supposed to be directing. This idea we were able to translate directly into judgments about certain kinds of episodes. Another suggestion was that we look at the extent to which a teacher engages in contacts with individual children as single targets of her attention. This involves some additions to our original analytical plan and this work is in progress at the present time.

Another source of feed in and feed back is the training of trainers of aides section in which a rating scale for teachers was devised. Here we have an opportunity to compare data from different approaches to the study of teacher behavior. We plan further joint efforts with this training of trainers of aides section.

Other categories of analysis of the episodes, some of which are described elsewhere, (Wright, 1967), will be used to delineate systematic differences and similarities among teachers. In our long term plan, we can relate these to such factors as teacher personality, classroom climate and child intellectual development.

The main practical problem for us, however, will be to try to find clues as to how to select teachers and to identify in behavioral terms ways to help teachers act as constructive agents in children's environments.

Structure and planning are pervasive elements in both the child and teacher focused sections of this area of research effort. Although our data are still in a tentative stage, we have both a responsibility to and an opportunity in DARCEE to relate our work to the on-going work of others.

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